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# 2018\_- \_Shift\_in\_Gender\_Roles\_in\_Amy \_Tan\_s\_The\_Joy\_Luck\_Club.pdf *by* Mujad Dididen

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**The Shift in Gender Roles in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*  
and Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*<sup>1</sup>**

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**1**  
**ABSTRACT**

The unfair gender roles under patriarchal system are constructed to preserve gender inequality between men and women. Gender role practices extend gradually to maintain the male hegemony to make women powerless because female traditional gender roles (femininities) create dependency to men. Men are assigned to masculinities equipped with power, whereas women are ascribed to femininities to set boundaries that limit their movement. Yet, the increase of female awareness of gender equality has changed this situation. Gender roles are gradually shifting from traditional to modern as the opportunities to receive education and job open widely to develop women's roles that enable them to give financial contribution to the family. This study was purposed to analyze the shift in gender roles in *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kite Runner*. This study used qualitative design in which Chinese traditional gender roles were described using Confucian perspective, whereas Afghan traditional gender roles were exposed in Islamic perspective. Moreover, Karl Marx' conflict theory was used to analyze the shift in gender roles in both novels. The results of study found that the construction of traditional gender roles in both China and Afghanistan was influenced mostly by patriarchy which perceives men as more superior than women. However, the dynamic changes of gender roles, especially femininities, supported by the increase of female education and occupation provide women with more power to achieve development. Further studies are encouraged to analyze other gender roles which have not discussed in this study.

**Keywords:** gender roles, patriarchy, Confucianism

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a synthesis of a postgraduate thesis, written by the same author with the same title.

## ABSTRAK

Peran gender yang tidak adil dalam sistem patriarki dibangun dalam rangka untuk mempertabankan ketidaksetaraan gender antara laki-laki dan perempuan. Praktik-praktik mengenai peran gender meluas secara bertahap sebagai upaya untuk mempertabankan hegemoni kaum laki-laki untuk membuat kaum perempuan tidak memiliki kekuatan, oleh karena peran-peran gender perempuan secara tradisional (feminitas) menciptakan ketergantungan terhadap kaum laki-laki. Pada laki-laki disematkan maskulinitas yang diperlengkapi dengan kekuasaan, sementara perempuan disemati feminitas untuk menciptakan batasan-batasan yang membatasi pergerakan mereka. Namun, meningkatnya kesadaran perempuan atas kesetaraan gender telah merubah situasi ini. Peran gender secara bertahap bergeser dari tradisional ke modern di saat peluang-peluang untuk mendapatkan pendidikan dan pekerjaan terbuka lebar untuk mengembangkan peran-peran gender perempuan yang membuat mereka dapat memberikan kontribusi finansial terhadap keluarga mereka. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menelaah pergeseran peran gender dalam *The Joy Luck Club* dan *The Kite Runner*. Studi ini menggunakan desain kualitatif yang mana peran tradisional masyarakat Tiongkok digambarkan menggunakan perspektif Konfusianisme, sementara peran gender masyarakat Afganistan dipaparkan dari sudut pandang Islam. Selanjutnya, teori konflik Karl Marx digunakan untuk menelaah pergeseran peran gender di kedua novel tersebut. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa konstruksi peran gender yang tradisional baik di Tiongkok maupun Afganistan utamanya dipengaruhi oleh sistem patriarki, yang memandang laki-laki lebih superior dari perempuan. Namun, perubahan-perubahan peran gender yang dinamis, khususnya feminitas, yang didukung oleh peningkatan pendidikan dan pekerjaan perempuan, memberikan perempuan kekuasaan yang lebih besar untuk mencapai perkembangan. Studi-studi lebih lanjut diharapkan melakukan analisis terhadap peran gender lainnya yang tidak dibahas dalam studi ini.

**Kata kunci:** peran gender, patriarki, Konfusianisme

## INTRODUCTION

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Gender has long become a debatable topic that may create controversies in the development of humankind. Not only scholars in social field, but also ordinary people are still discussing and debating the practices of gender that have occupied nearly all sectors in life, such as politics, economics, education, and other smaller scope of areas. Hussey (2003: 56) claims, "The earliest producers of masculinities are perhaps the most powerful: the family and the school". To convince people, Hussey (2003: 16) also states, "Most parents create a gendered world for their newborn by naming, birth announcements, dress." It proves that gender practices even start from the beginning of human life in the smallest unit of society, namely, the family. Family is the first institution, which introduces a baby to

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gender practices, for instance most parents choose what toys are appropriate with the sex of their child. A toy gun is acceptable for boys, whereas a doll is for girls.

To most women, gender is a discriminative word because it is a powerful weapon mostly used by men to show their dominance over women. Despite the reasons of classifying gender role into masculine and feminine, women feel that gender practices are never fair enough for them because men always use this term to stay on top of women. Hussey (2003: 8) states, "Not surprisingly, those advantaged by the social institution of gender want to maintain the status quo, ....". To men, it is likely a very effective tool to dominate and put pressures on the other group of sex. Men who have received the benefits of gender practices always try to maintain this product of culture to sustain the prevailing position over their opposite sex.

In spite of the men's struggle to keep the continuation of gender practice allowing them to have many advantages, modern women with the emergence of feminist movement are trying to break the hegemony of men with their superior masculinities. In other words, the concepts of masculinity and femininity are being questioned nowadays. Masculinity must be ready to lose its dominant power gradually against femininity. Indeed, the feminist movement starts with small waves of actions by launching propaganda that women are equal with men; that women should receive equal treatments as men do; and that they deserve what men do. Lorber notes that "gendered roles change and exemplifies that today fathers are taking care of little children, girls and boys are wearing unisex clothing and getting the same education, women and men are working at the same jobs" (Hussey, 2003: 9).

*The Kite Runner* is perceived as a masculine novel since the aroma of masculinity strongly surrounds the story. Through this novel, Hosseini portrays the life of Afghan people with masculinity and involves only few women in the story. In contrast, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* through characterization tries to put femininity on the surface as opposed to masculinity. Women dominate the characters in this novel even though male characters also exist only as extras. Femininity seems to seep out under the suppression done by men with their masculinity. As the consequence, the conflicts of gender roles that appear dominantly throughout the story enable the characters to experience changes in life. Therefore, this study is purposed to analyze the shift in gender roles assigned to the four Chinese families in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and to the three Afghan families in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*.

In line with the background of the study written above, the writer formulates 3 problems as follow:

1. How are Chinese traditional gender roles described in the four Chinese families in *The Joy Luck Club*?
2. How are Afghanistan traditional gender roles described in the three Afghan families in *The Kite Runner*?
3. Why and how does the shift in gender roles assigned to the four Chinese families in *The Joy Luck Club* and the three Afghan families in *The Kite Runner* happen?

### Gender Roles

Gender role is a product of culture made to provide men and women with an understanding that men and women have different functions, roles and responsibilities. "Gender role refers to a set of prescriptive, culture-specific expectations about what is appropriate for men and women" (Hussey, 2003: 2). It is a set of roles created by the society to organize how a man and a woman are supposed to be according to the culture practiced by the society. In practice, gender role differentiates between the roles of men and of women based on the norms constructed socially and culturally. Hence, men are expected to have male traits and behaviors, whereas women must have feminine traits and behaviors.

Gender role is classified into two categories: masculinity and femininity. The two concepts differ from one to another since gender role is created to place men and women in different boxes. "Masculinity is a standardized container, fixed by biology, into which all 'normal' men are placed, something 'natural' that can even be measured in terms of psychological traits and physical attributes" (Beynon, 2002: 2). It refers to a set of traits and behaviors culturally constructed by the society for males, such as assertive, protective, and strong. In contrast, femininity is a set of traits and behaviors culturally constructed by the society for females, such as nurturing, submissive, and weak.

What makes gender role issues more complicated is that masculinity and femininity may vary in different countries. In the preface of their book, Baron and Kotthoff (2001: XII) states, "... we depart from the assumption of diverse 'masculinities' and 'femininities' which, phenomenologically, may differ considerably from person to person and situation to situation. However, there is also stability in performing and perceiving gender".



The concepts of masculinity and femininity are not universal. Each country has different concepts of masculinity and femininity assigned to men and women based on their sex because the cultural differences influence the creation of gender roles. Moreover, they are non-static and non-stable so that they are subjects to change through different time and place depending much upon the socio-cultural and economic aspects, such as patriarchy system, class struggles, social conflicts, and so forth. Nonetheless, men and women, even in different countries, may have the same perspective about gender role in certain things. J.O. Rodale exemplifies traits related to gender, "Feminine: Soft, delicate, gentle, tender, docile, submissive, amenable, deferential .... Masculine: Robust, strong, lusty, energetic, potent, brave, bold, fearless ...." (Reinisch, Rosenblum, & Sanders, 1987: 3).

"Masculinity and femininity are relational concepts, which only have meaning in relation to each other" (Buscher, 2005: 5). When discussing masculinity, it is impossible not to involve femininity because the two concepts have a close relationship. To simplify, the existence of masculinity is always accompanied by femininity because "the ideas of masculinity and femininity exist only in comparative relation to one another. In other words, femininity does not exist independently of masculinity and vice versa" (Knapp, Muller, & Quiros, 2009: 1). Yet, as binary opposition, they are in contrast because each has its own traits and behaviors opposing to one another.

### Patriarchy and Gender Inequality

Patriarchy is always closely linked to the concepts of gender roles so that discussions about gender role should not leave out patriarchy as the important contribution to the construction of gender roles. The system of patriarchy brings its influences to the construction of gender roles for men and women expected to continue male dominance. To support the expectation, this social system positions men as the center in social organizations as Lindsey (2016, p. 3) defines patriarchy as "male-centered norms operating throughout all social institutions that become the standard to which all persons adhere". Patriarchy manipulates people to create norms based on male perspectives as the guidelines for both men and women in social life. In the eyes of patriarchy, men possess the highest status in nearly all cultural domains so that women's position is subordinate to them. "Patriarchy is thus, by definition, sexist" (Tyson, 2006: 85).

Patriarchy with its product of gender roles is claimed to be the causal factor for gender inequality because this system forms the imbalance in gender and power relations between men and women. Maddock (1999:

113) states that “the theory of patriarchy seeks to describe how gender inequality works within society and examines how the experience of gender roles and masculine and feminine identities underpin everyone's personal experience and social life”. The statement provides an understanding that patriarchy through its gender roles has a strong contribution to the inequality in gender. This system perceives men as more superior than the opposite sex so that critics from the feminists through feminist movements emerge to reject patriarchy that they accuse to be the significant factor for the existence of gender inequality. Under patriarchy, men who are indoctrinated to set the standard norms of life possess a great deal of power and other valuable benefits from the patriarchal masculinities.

The role of patriarchy in constructing gender roles automatically affects people in social life, yet the impacts of inequality in gender roles on men and women are quite different in which men are assigned to masculinities equipped with power. Whilst, women are ascribed to femininities covered with no power. Walby argues that “patriarchy as the 'system of social structures and practices that men use to dominate, oppress and exploit women’” (Maddock, 1999: 113). Hence, patriarchal masculinities representing male power are constructed to sustain male dominance, whereas patriarchal femininities are created to support male hegemony, build restrictions for women as well as keep them powerless. It enables men to have authority and power over anything so that male dominance over women appears inevitably to be a very common social phenomenon in patriarchal society.

In patriarchal family, a man is a leader; no woman is allowed to be a leader. With his responsibilities as leader, a man receives authority and power to make decisions for most important things in the family. Marx claims, “The *paterfamilias* had a great deal of power over the persons and property in his household” (Brown, 2012: 200).

A patriarchal family always provides power for a man as the family leader to control other members and dominate the family possession. Patriarchy never lets women to have power and authority in the family, except for household activities dealing with housekeeping, caring and nurturing children. Living under patriarchal system, women's life is full of restrictions and limitations that possibly make the relationship between men and women problematic.

Gender inequality appears persistently in the society in which patriarchy powerfully touches the social relationship. “Patriarchal relations tend to be strongest where men have very fixed views and ideas about what women should do and how they should behave in relation to them and within sexual relationships” (Maddock, 1999: 113). When patriarchal culture



lives strongly in the society for a long time, women are likely to experience gender inequality in a long period of time because men seen as the leaders in the society will only place them in the second rank in all aspects of life. The longer the society practices patriarchy, the deeper the women fall into gender inequality.

Lorber (2010: 4) asserts, "Gender inequality takes many different forms, depending on the economic structure and social organization in a particular society and on the culture of any particular group within that society". When a society live under patriarchy, and thus the social life is regulated based on patriarchy, gender inequality tend to spread and extend to reach nearly all cultural domains, such as medical, educational, financial, and political domain. Lorber (2010: 2) informs that "in the United States, women did not get the right to vote nationally until 1920". No woman possesses the political rights to have a career in politics - even to be a voter.

In relation with occupation, men have more priority and chances for career advancement. They even receive low salary for the same job done by men. Even in the family as the smallest social unit, women are inferior to men. In a patriarchal family, the husbands are free to go outside for hanging out, with friends, whereas the wives should stay at home taking care of the children and doing household chores all the time. Those phenomena are the factual portraits of inequality in gender.

### Conflict Theory

Sociological perspectives are in need to understand and explain gendered social phenomena happening in a society because they provide "logically interrelated propositions that explain empirical events." (Lindsey, 2016: 5) As a social construct, gender always accompanies any social aspects of life and develops over time following the social changes. In relation with the facts that people are doing gender in many social aspects, those perspectives offer descriptions and explanations about the factors affecting the construction of gender roles, the reasons why people differentiate gender roles between men and women, the way how people live together under gender role differences; and investigate the relationships among people in practicing gender roles. Each provides different understandings and explanations about what happens to a society with gender roles.

The extended practices of gender role in a society can be described and comprehended evidently using the sociological perspectives. Those perspectives are functionalism, conflict theory, symbolic interaction, and feminist sociological theory. Among the four major sociological perspectives on gender roles, this study applies conflict theory, also referred

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to as social conflict theory, to analyze gender roles and its shift in *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kite Runner* because the social relationships among the characters portrayed in both novels are engaged in conflicts and struggles involving thoughts and actions of both maintaining and rejecting traditional gender roles.

Conflict theory exists to contend the notion that social order happens voluntarily. Instead, this theory affirms that it is “preserved involuntarily through the exercise of power one social class holds over another.” (Lindsey, 2016: 8). Power and class are the two significant elements that should be taken as the major concerns in conflict theory so that Conflict theorists assert that society is always divided into classes. The world has never been free from the thoughts perceiving that the society is composed of different classes; even class division and class conflict still exist in this millennium to complicate the society.

Gender role as one of the elements organized in social order involves power possessed by a social class. Power takes part in the construction of gender role to preserve itself. Gender is a powerful tool for a class to sustain the dominance over other classes. Holter states that “gender systems become power arrangements ....” (Breines et al (Eds), 2000: 64). It means that gender, especially gender roles, is constructed and practiced to preserve the power of a social class or a group of people to dominate others.

This theory aimed to present a clear explanation about social conflicts sets its focus on power that is the symbol of dominance of the superior class over the inferior class. Conflicts in society are rooted from the efforts to compete and achieve power. “Originating from the writings of Karl Marx (1818–1883), conflict theory is based on the assumption that society is a stage on which struggles for power and dominance are acted out” (Lindsey, 2016: 8). Power is perceived as the main reason why conflicts come to the surface. Class division is created to maintain the power of the dominant class so that instability in society remains to exist due to social conflicts.

### Shift in Gender Roles

In most patriarchal countries where women are placed in subordinating position, gender roles are shifting from traditional to modern since women become more aware that there should be equality in gender. “The practices of gender inequality in most parts of the world, especially in the United States of America automatically trigger the reconstruction of

gender roles proposed by the feminists. Gender roles are not static and change as the needs of society change” (DeBiaggi, 2002: 41).

Since gender roles exist by the creation of the society, shifting traditional gender roles into acceptable modern gender roles is possible from generation to generation. The inequality in gender role practices that subordinate women strengthens the notion that human beings are equal in all aspects of life, except in things related to the different functions of the reproductive organs. Thus, some traditional gender roles are gradually, but undoubtedly, shifting to modern ones.

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Traditional gender roles force a man to be masculine; a woman must be feminine. The segregation between roles of men and women is clear to see. They assume that men should have masculine traits and behaviors according to what are listed in what the masculinists call ‘Act like a Man’ Box, whereas women are expected to follow the feminine attributes. ‘Boys do not cry’ is one of the common traditional masculinities, whereas ‘girls do not yell’ is an example of traditional femininity.

Helgeson (2012: 49) asserts that “the M/F scale published by The Attitude Interest Analysis Survey (AIAS) was also bipolar, which meant that masculinity and femininity were viewed as opposite ends of a single continuum”. Deaux, Lewis, Foushee, Helmreich, Spence, Major, Carnevale, also state that “a common perception exists that what is masculine is not feminine, and vice versa, a finding that has been demonstrated in a number of investigations” (Reinisch et al., 1987: 292). It illustrates that masculinity represents one end and femininity represents the other. Traditional masculinity and femininity are perceived as bipolar constructs that are separated to one another. Further, a man is masculine, whereas a woman is feminine. A man cannot be feminine, and vice versa. A man must possess masculine traits and behaviors. On the other hand, a woman must be assigned to feminine ones.

## METHOD

This study uses a sociological approach aimed to explore gender role and develop a detailed understanding of the shift in gender roles in *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kite Runner*. It compares the two novels to look for the similarities and differences of gender roles and its shift. In relation with the efforts to compare gender roles and its shift, the study of comparative literature following the American School is purposed to put the two different novels written in different setting of time and place in comparison. Among many similarities found in both novels, the main reason why this

study compares them is that the characters in both novels experience the shift in gender roles dynamically from childhood to adulthood.

The object of this study is the shift in gender roles seen in *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kite Runner*. The shift in gender roles shown in both novels has both similar and different factors that affect the main characters to make changes to their lives. This study focuses on analyzing the shift in gender roles happening to four Chinese families in *The Joy Luck Club* and three Afghan families in *The Kite Runner*.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### <sup>1</sup> Traditional gender roles in *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kite Runner*

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This study finds similarities between traditional gender roles in *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kite Runner*. Both novels show that women in both China and Afghanistan are described as the group which must be placed under men's domination. The traditional gender roles supporting the idea are as follows:

#### 1. Women as Property

In men's eyes, Chinese and Afghan women are seen only as property. The misperception which has a long history appears nearly everywhere since gender inequality strongly exists not only in Asia, particularly in ancient China and Afghanistan, but also in Europe. It is in line with the statement made by Lindsey (2016: 92) claiming that they are "viewed as a temporary commodity". It is similar to what happens during the capitalism era when women are allowed to participate in the production for lower wage. Due to the invention of modern machines, men's skills are not needed any longer because those sophisticated machines need no skills to operate. Consequently, women get into the industries to substitute male skillful labors. The involvement of women in industry is not a defeat to men because women degrade themselves by receiving lower wage. For financial efficiency, the Bourgeois makes use of the inferior position of female labors by giving them cheap wage. In short, women's labor is used for the sake of industrial benefits.

In China, men under the power of patriarchy perceive women as property because they can be bartered or sold in an arranged marriage as if they are just commodity for exchange. As seen in Lindo's arranged marriage, a Chinese woman "is expected to bring money and goods in the form of dowry to help offset the expenses associated with her upkeep. All

daughters add to the financial burden” (Lindsey, 2016: 92). Chinese follow patrilocality system which instructs a bride to move into her husband’s house so that dowry should be provided for the groom’s family in exchange for the expenses spent for feeding and keeping her. As commodity exchange, Lindo’s parents must hand over Lindo along with the furniture and bedding as her dowry to her husband’s family.

Concubinage seen in *The Joy Luck Club* is also a practice in marriage that supports Chinese women as property. According to Chinese old traditions, a man with the special rights to conduct polygamy can have several women in legal marriage. Despite other minor reasons, the practice of polygamy is mostly done to have sexual pleasure and to produce a child, particularly a son to continue the generation.

“But one thing she could not have: children. And she knew Wu Tsing would soon become anxious to have a son who could perform the ancestral rites and therefore guarantee his own spiritual eternity. (Tan, 1989: 265)

In contrast, a woman, portrayed in An-mei’s mother, is expected to show fidelity in a marriage because she can only marry once in a lifetime. The eternal fidelity from a woman is an obligation as a virtuous woman. Even after the death of husband, a woman should be loyal or faithful to remain a widow as quoted by Rainey (2010: 170) from Confucianism that a woman should be “faithful to one’s husband during marriage; and remaining loyal to his memory and not remarrying after his death”.

In Afghanistan, the evidence that women are just men’s property clearly appears in *The Kite Runner*. As the class conflict arises between Pashtuns and Hazaras, women from Hazara ethnicity are sold by Pashtuns for money because they think that Hazara women are just properties which deserve to be treated as trade commodity. In Afghanistan, the two ethnics are in conflict for dominating power. Pashtuns are the superior class, whereas Hazaras are the inferior. The practice of human trafficking is clearly against the human rights in which no human beings are objects for trade. It shows how men equipped with power and protected by patriarchy subordinate women in Afghanistan.

“The book said that my people had killed the Hazaras, driven them from their lands, burned their homes, and sold their women.” (Hosseini, 2003: 9)

In familial context, there is only one female character in *The Kite Runner* who is treated as a property. Sanaubar is described as a cheap woman who intentionally loses her dignity to sleep with different men. Men use her body for pleasure is the manifestation of the female inferiority as property.



To save the family's dignity, her uncle forces her to marry Ali in an arranged marriage in which she loses her rights and opportunities to make decisions for her life because they must be submissive to men. Once a man makes a decision, she has no choice to reject it. In other words, she loses her freedom and must submit herself to the power and authority of men. When women believe that they belong to men, they become powerless in everything.

## 2. Women must be obedient

Chinese traditional gender roles expect women to be totally obedient or submissive. Female submissiveness means to give or submit her life to the dominance of her husband. "Women are expected to have an infinite capacity for sacrifice in their role as mothers and to be submissive to the demands of the men in their family" (Lindsey, 2016: 258). It illustrates that women should devote her life to men for good or until death because there is no limit for female submissiveness in family. Consequently, they must totally depend on the male dominance that always places them as a subordinate class in the society.

As a feminine novel, *The Joy Luck Club* is filled with female characters attached to obedience. It appears clearly in the four Chinese families between mother-daughter and husband-wife. Confucianism has set out how both mother-daughter and husband-wife relationship should run in relation with obedience. Despite the good purpose of Confucianism aimed at reforming the morality, it also brings enormous side effects to the society. Lindsey (2016: 172) asserts, "The traditional Chinese family was based on Confucian principles, with complete authority to males". Confucianism is said to walk hand in hand with patriarchy to maintain female subordination. The practice of obedience is not only seen in a woman who should be obedient to her man, but also in a daughter who should obey her mother since female hierarchy is also available in Chinese society as Lindsey (2016: 173) claims that "a female hierarchy also existed". In sequence of order, a Chinese woman should be obedient to her mother, her older sister, and her mother-in-law when she gets married.

Similarly, Afghan men also have responsibilities as a leader which is usually accompanied by another role as to make decisions for the members under his leadership. In familial context, a father or a husband functions himself as the leader for his wife and children. Baba and General Taheri are the two men described as the leaders of family with strong power and control over the members of the family. Patriarchal system that positions men higher than women expects an Afghan man to be a leader. Simply



saying, leadership must be on man's hands in governmental area, society, or even in a smaller scope, such as family.

### 3. Women are in a weak position in the family

Through *The Joy Luck Club*, Amy Tan tries to convey a patriarchal message that women have a weak position in the family. It is absolutely a stereotype to make women believe that they need to be submissive to their fate. They must surrender to their destiny. As opposed to men as the dominant class, women are also forced to receive their fate as the subordinate class so that they become weak and cannot have control over their own lives. They cannot do anything to prevent and stop men from oppressing them. They cannot turn down or run away from men's decisions. In short, they must accept anything as a fate. Patriarchy has succeeded to create an opinion that women are powerless so that men can use their power to preserve their dominance.

Afghan people deeply apply patriarchy supported by Islam which tells a man to be a protector. They believe that men are born to protect women as stated in The Holy *Qur'an*, in *Surah An-Nisa*: 34. According to the *ayah* (verse), men must play their roles as the guardians of women. The meaning of the word 'to guard' is to protect. Since every word in the Holy *Qur'an* is the sayings of Allah, Afghan Muslims believe that Allah has instructed men to provide protection for others, especially women and children. To support the duty as the protector, men are expected to be physically strong and brave. Those two characteristics unite to assist men to do their role as the protector.

Most people assume that there is a cause-effect relationship between strong physical appearance and the men's role as to provide protection. Strong physical appearance is a male gender role assigned to men. Big body and height are usually used as the measurement to describe the strength of men even though this assumption is not always right. The strong physical gift from God to most men is accompanied by the great responsibilities on their shoulders. One of them is that men must be able to give protection. Therefore, people in Afghanistan also expect men to be able to protect women who are believed to possess weakness in physical appearance so that they deserve to receive protection from men with their strength.

### 4. Women do household chores

Before industrialization, in most countries, including China, women are ascribed to their role as homemakers because the opportunities for them

to work outside home are still unavailable. In this context, they are fully responsible for doing household chores to provide full services for the family. "Confucianism favored the labor division between male and female in the household: a husband was in charge of external responsibilities while a wife was responsible for internal matters, ..." (Yao, 2000: 184). Like in other patriarchal countries, Chinese people distinguish the roles of a husband and a wife. Men work outside home for money, whereas women stay at home doing unpaid domestic works. It is what we call division of labor.

Afghan people apply a traditional division of labor in which men should be responsible for fulfilling any family needs from the money they earn by working outside home, whereas women only manage the necessities using the money from their husbands. The division of labor in the family context clearly separates the roles of a husband and wife. However, both have responsibility to function their roles to maintain the continuity of the family dealing with economic necessities. Afghan men are expected to be the breadwinners to produce money outside home. As the breadwinners, they work outside to earn money for the family. In contrast, women living under patriarchy should not work outside home because it is not appropriate for women to go outside home without their husbands. In consequence, men receive more benefits from that role.

## 5. Women should produce children

Women, by nature, have three reproductive roles as to conceive a baby, give birth, and care for children in family because God has provided them with reproductive organs to support the duties. The problem is that Chinese men relate those roles to the traditional gender role that expects women to produce children. The traditional gender role that is related to the female reproductive roles is likely to be the most unfair because each wife is obliged to conceive a baby. Logically, some unfortunate women might be diagnosed with reproductive medical problems that cause them to be sterile or barren.

The existence of a child in a family is a true happiness. Afghan men share a belief that children are the manifestation of a successful marriage as mentioned in the Qur'an *Surah An-Nabl ayah* 72 that one of the purposes of marriage is to have children for continuing the quality generation to worship Allah. "And Allah has given you spouses from your kind, and has granted you through your spouses, sons and grandsons, and has provided you wholesome things as sustenance. (After knowing all this), do they still believe in falsehood and deny Allah's bounty" ("Towards Understanding the Quran," n.d.)

Ideally, women are supposed to get pregnant and produce children. Unlike Confucianism, Islam does not specifically mention about a son or a girl for the preference. However, Afghanistan is a patriarchal and patrilineal country in which men are the superior. In fact, Soraya does not experience women's fate as to get pregnant after the first years of their marriage. They visit a doctor to make sure that they can have a child. Yet, the series of test prove that they have unexpected infertility. Then, they follow in-vitro fertilization program in which the result is still unsatisfying. The doctor suggests them to adopt a baby. However, General Taheri refuses the idea. He says that it is inappropriate for Afghan family to have a child not from their own blood.

Blood is a powerful thing, *bachem*, and when you adopt, you don't know whose blood you're bringing into your house. (Hosseini, 2003: 187)

## 6. Women as men's dignity

Confucianism has set out the rights for women dealing with marriage. Similar with other Confucian's teachings about loyalty, women's fidelity to husband is still among the top priority for women to possess in familial relationship because loyalty is a part of family's dignity. "The highest virtues for women were loyalty and chastity. Chastity meant being a virgin before marriage; being faithful to one's husband during marriage; and remaining loyal to his memory and not remarrying after his death" (Rainey, 2010: 170). Once a woman marries a man, she will be engaged to her husband for the rest of her life. It means that Chinese traditional gender roles related to marriage expect women to possess more fidelity than men.

Most people believe that *fidelity or faithfulness* is very significant to build a harmonious and everlasting marriage. The gender inequality existing in China makes women suffered because women must give eternal faithfulness, whereas, fidelity in men is unquestioned. According to Chinese old traditions, a woman can only marry one man, whereas a man can marry several women simultaneously to practice polygamy. Marrying another man will disgrace and dishonor the family's dignity and reputation even after the husband has died. In short, women are expected to be faithful to her husband for the rest of their lives.

Whilst, Afghan men believe that *nang* and *namoos* is the top priority that must be well-protected. In Afghan culture, breaking *nang* and *namoos* that may represent men's dignity may result in shame. If the family's honor ruins, the whole members of the family will receive the negative impacts so that a man as a leader will strongly protect them for the sake of family's reputation. For instance, wearing *burqa* is aimed at keeping a woman's body

from men's eyes. When the body is exposed to other men, except her own husband, she brings shame not only to her husband, but also to her family as a whole.

### <sup>1</sup> Shift from traditional to modern gender roles in *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kite Runner*

<sup>2</sup> This study finds similarities between Chinese and Afghan traditional gender roles portrayed in *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kite Runner* merely because China and Afghanistan apply patriarchal system in the society. In both novels, men are the upper class, whereas women are perceived as the lower class. The unfair treatment conducted by men triggers female awareness which finally leads to the shift in gender roles as supported by the findings revealing that gender roles found in both novels shift from traditional to modern.

Among six Chinese traditional gender roles portrayed in *The Joy Luck Club*, four of them experience changes which can be seen in the life of female characters. In addition, the shift in gender roles can also be seen in *The Kite Runner* which provides evidences that Afghanistan traditional gender roles shift to modern. Among six Afghanistan traditional gender roles portrayed in *The Kite Runner*, three of them experience changes. Living in the United States makes Chinese and Afghan immigrants open their minds that the female traditional gender roles practiced in China and Afghanistan bring disadvantages to women's development so that actions should be made to change them. Table 3 below summarizes the shift from traditional to modern gender roles in both novels. It contains four traditional gender roles which shift to modern gender roles due to some influencing factors which are also discussed in this section.

Since gender role is subject to change, this study reveals that the traditional gender roles in both China and Afghanistan depicted previously do not experience total changes because the strong patriarchy and the level of piety to a religion and philosophy still exist as the obstructing factors for the shift. However, those changes are significant because women are getting closer gradually to gender equality. They are shifting from traditional to modern gender roles due to several factors. Education, occupation, and economy are the three contributing factors that support the shift in gender roles. Those three factors are correlated to one another. The increasing level of female education brings women more opportunities to get occupation, thus economic improvement.

In China, patriarchy supported by Confucianism perceives women as the lower class. This basic idea results in gender inequality as seen in the findings that women are seen as property or commodity; women should be obedient; women have a weak position in the family; women do household chores; women should produce children with son preference; and women should maintain the family dignity. All those gender roles violate women's rights to develop themselves and determine their own fate.

In Afghanistan, The Taliban through Islamization tries to preserve patriarchy by keeping women as the lower class. Afghan societies, especially the men make use of some verses in the holy Qur'an to preserve the inferior position of women. This gender stereotype maintains gender inequality as seen in the findings that men possess women as property; women should be obedient; women have a weak position in the family; women do household chores; women should produce children; and women are the symbol of dignity. Those traditional gender roles certainly obstruct women to reach independence and freedom.

The Chinese and Afghan traditions illustrating that women as properties are arranged marriage and polygamy. In Chinese arranged marriage, a woman cannot choose the man she loves because her parents have decided the man with whom she should marry. A woman must obey her parents as told by Confucius. In Afghanistan, the writer cannot find the basic reason why arranged marriage becomes a tradition. Meanwhile, the practice of polygamy done by Chinese men does not belong to Confucianism. Men conduct polygamy simply because they perceive women are inferior so that they treat them as they like. When a man wants to marry another woman, he does not need any permission from his wife because a woman should be obedient to her husband. Confucianism makes Chinese women submissive to her husband. Meanwhile, Afghan men follow the Prophet Muhammad who conducted polygamy to protect and maintain women's dignity. In the holy Qur'an, *surah An-Nisa' ayah 3* implies that the practice of polygamy must be conducted based on justice or fairness. Thus, polygamy is only allowed when a man is able to fulfill the rights of all his wives in a fair manner.

Nowadays, arranged marriage is decreasing because women are now aware of their status as equal as men. Polygamy also declines since women also demand men to be faithful to one wife. Gender equality in both China and Afghanistan has increased even though women still need to do more efforts to make it equal. Chinese government also produces law to restrict the unfair practices of marriage to ensure that their women reach gender equality.



In modern era, Chinese and Afghan immigrants in the United States realize that the traditional gender roles assigned for women are not fair because they are the agents of gender inequality. Various factors give contributions to the shift in female gender roles are education, occupation, and economy. Those three factors influence the shift in gender roles from traditional to modern. The three factors work in collaboration to enable women to play the roles equally as men do.

In the United States, female Chinese and Afghan immigrants have their rights to have education as equally the same as men. Women's education has opened their opportunity to be equal with men. Given the opportunity, men and women have the same level of education. In ancient times in China, women are inferior because patriarchy does not let them to be educated. In modern era, women are well-educated. In *The Joy Luck Club*, the four Chinese mothers are away from education, whereas their American-born daughters receive education in the United States. In *The Kite Runner*, Afghan women immigrating to the United States also receive education. In short, the United States of America provides the same opportunities for men and women to receive education.

Backboned by education, women's empowerment in the United States increases so that job opportunity is also widely open for the immigrants. Women are no longer jobless because education has developed their knowledge and skills to do jobs outside home. They are not assigned to domestic chores anymore for their ignorance because they can sell their knowledge and skills to work outside home and receive payment. In short, women can also play the role as the breadwinner to support their husbands in fulfilling the family needs.

The financial condition in Chinese and Afghan immigrant families has improved when the involvement of the women in sharing responsibility to support the financial needs increases. Consequently, women's dependence to men also decreases. When independence increases, women have bargaining power to release them from traditional gender roles assigned to females. Women, represented by the Chinese daughters and General Taheri's wife and daughter living in America, are not seen as property anymore because they choose not only to stay at home anymore. They do job outside home and earn money so that they have more chances to do what they want without any interference from anybody. They may disobey their mothers and their husbands for any inconveniences and inappropriateness they experience. Moreover, instead of being passive, they may take initiatives to start doing necessary actions when the condition is not good and appropriate for them.



Shift in male gender roles also happens to some male characters In *The Kite Runner*, especially in Amir during his adulthood. In childhood, he is told to be a boy with low masculinities. He used to be under protection from his best friend, Hassan. He used to be a coward when he is faced with disturbance from his friends. The worst is when he does not try to prevent Hassan from being raped homosexually. Finally, the shift in gender roles in Amir happens when he reaches his adulthood in the United States. The evidences support the changes in his life. He flies back to Pakistan and his homeland to save Hassan's son, named Sohrab from the Taliban. It is a manifestation of the change from being protected to being a protector. The protection is triggered by the mistakes he did to Hassan in his childhood. The second shift in gender roles is shown by the emergence of his bravery. Without bravery, it is impossible for someone to be able to give protection because he becomes brave to take risks and dangers in saving his nephew from the Taliban.

The shift in Amir's gender roles is also triggered by his effort to stay in 'act like a man' box that ascribes males to masculine traits and behaviors. In his childhood, his father assumed that he has low masculinities for being unable to protect himself and others and being a coward. His inability to be protective and brave result in a big mistake that haunts him for the rest of his life until he finds a way to find redemption. Born as a male assigned to be protective, he finally realizes that he should be able to provide protection for Sohrab.

General Taheri also experiences the shift in gender role dealing with occupational status. As an Afghan man, he is assigned to be the breadwinner. In the United States, he chooses not to work to finance his family. He remains jobless to save his *nang* and *namoos* or dignity. To him, doing a low-level job will only degrade his status as a respectful man. To Afghan men, dignity means a lot. It is the top priority because losing dignity means to lose everything.

## CONCLUSION

This study reveals the traditional gender roles in China and Afghanistan as well as the shift from traditional gender roles to modern ones which happen to some characters in *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kite Runner*. The traditional gender roles in both countries are constructed to dominate and maintain power. Therefore, conflict theory is used to describe why men and women should be different in relation with gender. According to the conflict theory, power dominated by men is the basic reason why women should be subordinated. Furthermore, gender differences between men and women in both China and Afghanistan, manifested in traditional

gender roles, have a strong relationship with patriarchy and religions. Besides patriarchy, Chinese traditional gender roles are also influenced by Confucianism which enriches the explanation about the construction of gender roles in China, whereas Afghan people who also live under patriarchal system also believe that Islam also gives great contribution to different gender roles assigned to men and women.

In relation with the first research question, this study finds out that *The Joy Luck Club* describes Chinese female traditional gender roles which are attached to nearly all female characters since this novel is a feminine novel. However, minor male characters are also involved to describe male traditional gender roles as opposed to the female ones. The writer finds two factors that bring influences to the construction of traditional gender roles in China: patriarchy and Confucianism. Those two factors support men's domination over women by creating masculinities and femininities which give advantages to men.

In relation with the second research question, the study finds out that *The Kite Runner* perceived as a masculine novel depicts Afghan traditional gender roles which are attached to nearly all male characters. The author only uses several minor female characters assigned to traditional gender roles to give better understanding about the differences between traditional gender roles for men and women in that country. Most traditional gender roles found in Afghanistan depicted in this novel are constructed based on patriarchy and Islamic teachings which are followed by most Afghan people. Patriarchy plays its roles to the construction of gender roles in Afghanistan. Besides, Islamic teachings, especially *Surah An-Nisa' ayat* 34 and *An-Nahl ayat* 72, affect how patriarchal society uses them to create misperception about gender roles among Afghan people.

Dealing with the third research question, the writer finds some evidences that relate to the shift in gender roles in both novels. Because of the increase of female awareness about gender equality resulted from the rise of feminist movement to increase the opportunities for both education and occupation, and to achieve economic or financial improvement in the family, some gender roles experience the shift from traditional to non-traditional or modern. Backboned by the need to improve the economic condition in the family, some female characters in both novels pursue education and get occupation. Those three factors give a significant contribution to women's improvement in the society as shown by the evidences that traditional gender roles are shifting. Among six Chinese traditional gender roles, four of them are shifting to modern ones. Meanwhile, among six Afghan traditional gender roles, four are shifting to modern.

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